

VZCZCXRO5952
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHAE #0830/01 2841515
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 111515Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8476
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0155
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1401
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1226
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0558
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASMARA 000830

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [UNSC](#) [PINR](#) [KPKO](#) [ER](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: UN SRSG GIVES VIEWS ON ERITREA AND SOMALIA

Classified By: CDA Jennifer McIntyre for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: UN Special Representative for the Secretary General (SRSG) for Somalia Francois Lonseny

SIPDIS

Fall briefed Emboffs October 5 on his meeting with Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) President Isaias Afwerki and provided his views on the fluid situation in Somalia. Fall expressed concern that Eritrea and Ethiopia are embarking on a proxy war in Somalia and fears that events on the ground may be assuming their own momentum. The Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) territorial gains within southern Somalia could create a fait accompli before the scheduled talks between CIC and Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Khartoum. The momentum of the Courts could also pressure Ethiopia into a decision to deploy unilaterally to Somalia, in advance of an IGAD or UN decision. The GSE's involvement in Somalia appears strategically calculated to strengthen its position as a regional player. End Summary.

FALL BRIEFS ON MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ISAIAS

12. (C) On October 4, President Isaias met with SRSG Fall and Bruno Mpondo-Epo, Director of Political Affairs for the UN Political Office on Somalia (UNPOS). President Isaias told SRSG Fall that Eritrea opposes the deployment of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) troops to Somalia and expressed GSE support for continuing negotiations between the CIC and TFG. Isaias stated his view of the CIC as a national, not a terrorist, movement. He pointedly remarked that Islam does not equate to terrorism, and that the GSE supports the CIC actions to use religion, and not clan divisions, to unite Somalia. President Isaias commented that the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) does not reflect the view of the people. He emphasized that all countries in the region should respect Somalia's sovereignty and not interfere in their internal affairs. Fall said President Isaias refuted allegations that Eritrea is engaged in a proxy war with Ethiopia.

13. (C) With regards to the upcoming meetings between TFG and CIC in Khartoum, President Isaias told SRSG Fall that IGAD, AU, EC and UN representatives should attend the negotiations. Without these four parties present, Isaias

maintained the negotiations would fail.

¶4. (C) In a sidebar conversation with Poloff, UNPOS Director Mpondo-Epo added more details of SRSF Fall's conversations with President Isaias. In the meeting, President Isaias averred that Eritrea has a responsibility to the Islamic Courts and said that the GSE has provided them "notional" support. President Isaias spoke at length about the emotional connection between Eritrea and Somalia and about his personal connection to Somalia, after having spent time there earlier in his life. Isaias expressed his pleasure that peace has come at last to southern Somalia and noted with concern that the international community wants to take this away from the people.

UNPOS DIRECTOR: ERITREA SEEKS GREATER REGIONAL INFLUENCE

¶5. (C) In assessing Eritrea's role in Somalia, Mpondo-Epo offered Poloff two explanations for GSE involvement. First, Eritrea seeks to be a powerful player in the region. By building an alliance with the CIC, not only do they get to poke at their Ethiopian neighbors, they also stand to gain a regionally valuable relationship. As the Court's political control in Somalia expands and their relationship with Eritrea strengthens, the GSE calculates that the international community will need it to serve as an intermediary with the CIC. With this strategy, Eritrea strives to become the linchpin to resolving the conflict in Somalia. Second, the GSE is focused on keeping Somalia united and anti-Ethiopian -- and as such preventing Ethiopia access to Somalia's ports, which in turn, would increase the pressure on the Ethiopians to resolve their border dispute with Eritrea.

ASMARA 00000830 002 OF 003

Without sea access through Somalia, Mpondo-Epo posited, the Ethiopians will be forced to address the border demarcation in order to begin subsequent negotiations for access to the Eritrean port of Assab.

FALL CONCERNED OVER SITUATION ON THE GROUND

¶6. (C) SRSF Fall expressed his concerns to Emboffs about Somalia's immediate future. He fears the CIC will not stop its advance, and with material support from Arab countries, the situation could deteriorate to civil war and greater conflict. The CIC, he said, was fomenting discontent in cities outside of their current control as to build support for their movement as they approached these cities, including in Somaliland and in Puntland. He noted that if action were not taken to protect Baidoa, the Islamic Courts would eventually take it, if not directly, then by organizing groups within Baidoa.

¶7. (C) Based on remarks made by Ethiopian President Meles Zenawi during their recent meeting, SRSF Fall worried that Ethiopia may feel it cannot afford to wait for a UN or IGAD decision to deploy peacekeepers if the CIC continues its momentum. While Ethiopia supports an IGAD deployment, Meles may decide to take unilateral action if the situation continues to sour for the TFG. Fall expressed concern that Somalia was, in fact, serving as a proxy war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and confrontation between them in Somalia could lead to increased tensions along the Eritrean and Ethiopian border. He found credible the reports of Eritrean involvement in Somalia, including the presence of an unnamed Eritrean military advisor in Mogadishu. He further affirmed Kenya's recent increase of security along its shared border with Somalia.

¶8. (C) SRSF Fall commented on the fluid situation in Somalia and noted that the balance of power could shift

more heavily to the CIC within the next few weeks. The upcoming meeting in Khartoum and the next UNSC meeting in early November may be faced with a markedly different set of circumstances than at present. He mentioned that some UNSC members (without naming them) had requested an early briefing on the situation in the region prior to the UNSC meeting. Fall also noted the representatives from the three UN missions in the Horn -- UNMIS, UNMEE and UNPOS - - were scheduled to meet in Nairobi the weekend of October 7 to discuss the broader, interlinking regional issues.

¶9. (C) SRSF Fall stated that the UN had "no problem" in principle with IGAD deployment of peacekeepers. IGAD members remain split, however, with Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia supporting deployment and Eritrea, Djibouti and Sudan in opposition. Further complicating the issue, the CIC continues to firmly oppose IGAD deployment and even within the TFG ranks, there is no agreement. Even with an agreement to deploy peacekeepers, significant issues would still have to be resolved: for example, identifying the countries that would provide the recommended eight battalions and determining who would pay for the operations. SRSF Fall concluded by cautioning that before endorsing a deployment, "we need to be sure deployment will help."

COMMENT

¶10. (C) SRSF Fall's meeting with President Isaias offered no surprises, echoing Eritrea's previous public statements on Somalia. While Eritrea is clearly involved in Somalia, the extent of the involvement still remains a matter of speculation. What is clear is that Eritrea's cozying up to the CIC is a calculated move to position the GSE as a key player in the region, similar to the role they have carved out in their relationship to Sudan. Eritrea appears to be pursuing a fairly effective strategy aimed at both increasing their regional influence and maintaining pressure on Ethiopia. End Comment.

ASMARA 00000830 003 OF 003

MCINTYRE